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SENATOR ATTACKS SECREC Y BREACHES

Intelligence Panel Head Holds Executive Branch Officials Largely Responsible

By STEPHEN ENGELBERG

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 4 — The chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said today that officials in the executive branch were largely to blame for unauthorized disclosures of secret information affecting national security.

"Every administration has faced the problem of leaks, but none so much as this one," the chairman, Senator Dave Durenberger, Republican of Minnesota, said in a speech before the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations. The speech text was made available by his office here.

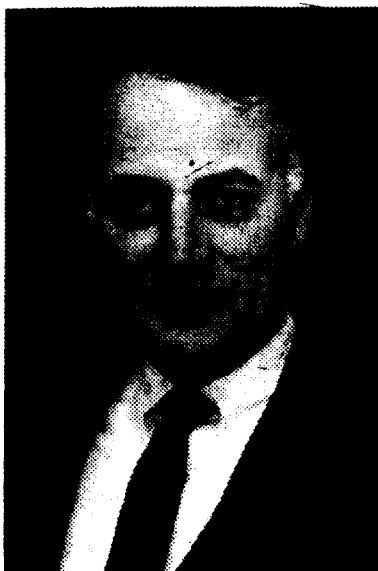
Mr. Durenberger asserted that no group in Congress or the Reagan Administration took greater care to protect secrets than the Senate panel. Late last year the Director of Central Intelligence, William J. Casey, said that members of the Senate intelligence committee had compromised sources and methods of intelligence gathering by discussing secret matters in public.

"Those who malign the committee for overt or covert release of classified information," Mr. Durenberger said, "are more often than not seeking to destroy the credibility of the oversight process, rather than to improve security."

Influencing Public Debate

Mr. Durenberger said that in this Administration and others classified information was often disclosed by officials trying to influence public debate of particular issues. He cited the dispute over whether the United States could adequately monitor Soviet compliance with arms control treaties.

He said that a newspaper column late last year by Rowland Evans and Robert Novak quoted a classified report by the Central Intelligence Agency as disclosing difficulties in monitoring Soviet compliance with treaties.



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Senator Dave Durenberger

"That disclosure clearly served the interest of one side in the debate within the Administration over policy for arms control negotiations in preparation for the Reagan-Gorbachev summit," the Senator said, referring to the November meeting of President Reagan and Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader.

Mr. Durenberger also criticized Reagan Administration officials for proposing last month to make public part of a classified C.I.A. document on the propaganda plans of the Government of Nicaragua. In the end the document was not made public for fear that it would reveal sources and methods of intelligence gathering.

Mr. Durenberger said, "When the White House offers to release classified intelligence reports in order to sway votes in Congress, the lack of concern for sources and methods sends just the wrong message to subordinates in the Administration, namely, 'You, too, may play fast and loose with security.'"

Few Are Caught

Senator Durenberger acknowledged that few of those who disclosed classified information were caught or punished.

A spokesman for the Federal Bureau of Investigation would not say today how many people were currently under investigation in cases involving disclosure of classified information, but officials in several agencies have said in recent weeks that many such inquiries were under way.

Law-enforcement officials have said that the bureau generally dislikes such investigations, because they rarely lead to arrests and sometimes implicate high-ranking officials.

Mr. Durenberger offered several suggestions for reducing the number of disclosures of secret information. He urged the Administration to offer a complete public response when partial versions of secret material appeared in the news media. He said this would remove the advantage enjoyed by those who release such information in the hope that contradictory data will remain secret.

Mr. Durenberger also called for a reduction in the amount of classified information, and said fuller public discussion was needed of issues that are now discussed only in secrecy.

He said he would consider supporting a law that would punish unauthorized disclosure with criminal penalties.

The Reagan Administration last year won a conviction against Samuel Loring Morison, a Navy analyst accused under an espionage law of selling a classified photograph to a military affairs weekly.

It was the first time that statute had been used against someone charged with passing information to a journalist.

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